

## VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

### PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

Get to know these words before you read "The Gift of the Magi."

**instigates** (in'stə-gāts') v.: gives rise to; causes.

*When Jim and Della fight, it is usually money that **instigates** the argument.*

**agile** (aj'əl) adj.: moving with ease.

*Della's movements were graceful and **agile**, like a cat's.*

**depreciate** (dē-prē'shē-āt') v.: make something seem less important; lower the value of.

*Will the value of the jewels **depreciate**, or will their worth increase?*

**cascade** (kas-kād') n.: waterfall.

*Like a **cascade**, tears ran down Della's cheeks.*

**ransacking** (ran'sak'in) v.: searching thoroughly.

*Della was **ransacking** her purse, looking in every pocket for a coin.*

**discreet** (di-skrēt') adj.: showing good judgment in words or actions, especially in being silent or careful.

*To Jim, the **discreet** thing to do was not to mention the gift.*

**scrutiny** (skrōōt'n-ē) n.: close inspection.

*Careful **scrutiny** of the jacket showed many worn spots.*

**nimble** (nim'bəl) adj.: quickly moving.

*With **nimble** hands she untied the carefully wrapped package.*

**coveted** (kuv'it-id) v. used as adj.: longed-for.

*Della's wishes were granted when she received the **coveted** treasure.*

**singed** (sinjd) v. used as adj.: slightly burned.

*Della looked at her **singed** hair, which she had burned while using the curling iron.*

### DICTION: PLAIN OR FANCY?

**Diction** means "word choice." Diction is an important aspect of a writer's style. For instance, look at this sentence from "The Gift of the Magi":

"For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction."

This fancy, or *ornate*, language may sound old-fashioned to you. Here is the same sentence rewritten in a simple style that sounds very modern.

"Okay, let's pretend we don't see them."

The two sentences have pretty much the same meaning, but their diction—their choice of words—differs. As you read "The Gift of the Magi," be aware of O. Henry's special style. You'll have a chance to practice rewriting his sentences in simpler language.